Fair Hope - Cape Palmas - August 15th 1835

Messrs White, Johnson & Hendrison

Dear Brethren.

Yours of the 20th of April in behalf of the Society of Inquiry at Princeton, together with files of Newspapers & periodicals from other Brethren of the Seminary, was received a few days since, & I have commenced a reply, in anticipation of an opportunity we hope to have, of forwarding letters to America. It has not been two years, since I was myself a Secretary for a Society in Columbia District, similar to your own. I then felt the pleasure of preparing letters for dear brethren in foreign lands - Now I can speake from experience, of the pleasure, one feels at the reception of such letters; & shall for the time to come, endeavour to continue a correspondence with your Society. The pleasure I derive from this correspondence is materially enhanced by the consideration, that many of you, are my personal acquaintances, & that you all feel an interest in the cause I have espoused.

perhaps I cannot have a better guide for what I have to say, than the inquiries which you have made.

In the first place, you inquire "What is the character of the people" Moral, intellectual religious &c. - The moral character of this people is much like that in all other parts of the world where the redeeming power of the Gospel has not been exerted. It is a melancholy fact that human nature when left to itself tends to misery & degradation - & here we behold it, I had almost said, an unmingled mass of corruption & guilt. There are redeeming features in the African character - what might be called noble qualities, but they are associated with so many others of a degrading nature, that they are not readily discerned. As a people they are active, industrious & energetic - but theft, lying, duplicity & avarice are vices that are universal.

They have a religion, but God is not its supreme object. Although they acknowledge God to be the Creator of all things, they look upon the Devil as the controling agent of all providence & to him all their services are directed. They have consecrated places where they carry food statedly to him. I was attracted from my road a few days since as I was passing one of their villages to see the preparations that was making for his breakfast. I found four doctors (as they call themselves) sitting around a large pot of rice & chickens which they had boiled. I inquired what that food was intended for. One of the priests replied "he is

debly". How often do you bring that food for him? "two time every moon" — How did you know that he was hungry this morning? — "Him peak 'um in my ear last night". Can he eat all that rice & chicken which you have there at one time? "No! he say we must eat some & he eat some himself". Where did you get that rice & those chickens? "You man, One that was going from the place & looking sad enough at the regulations of the Devil) the debly say he must give 'um dis time". And it is just in this way that certain men practice upon the whole community. And the man above refered to refused to furnish the food, even had it amounted to the whole of his property, he would have been poisoned secretely by these men, or sentenced by their means to drink publicly a poisonous & deadly draught. I cannot enter into a details of their religious ceremonies — suffice it to say it is a mere routine of fooleries & nonsense. I am aware that it is believed by many that the negro race is naturally deficient in intellect. But that opinion, I venture to apert, is founded upon unsounds premises. However true it may be of our american negroes who have been trammelled in so many ways & for so long a time, it is not of native Africans, & no one who has been in this country capable of judging, will acknowledge it as a fact. They discover a sprightliness & shrewdness of mind which for an uncultivated people, is truly surprising. And it a matter of serious regret that energies, that are so improveable & might be the means of so much good are permitted to be employed in the services of the devil. My heart bleeds when I look around upon the vaste vaste moral, religious & intellectual, which overspreads this immense Continent — & it must continue to be a waste until the vivifying influences of the Gospels is felt is every where felt.

You inquire "What objections do the people make to the Gospel?" - to this inquiry I am sorry that I am compelled to reply that the Gospel has not yet been so distinctly set before their minds as to elicit

their approval or disapproval of it. In general, they they seem to think it a matter that belongs to white men alone, & would rather be left to walk in the paths which their fathers trod than to be troubled with a new religion. I have often rebuked them for working on sabbath & for other sins, & the invariable reply is "me no sabby (understand) de good book". It is frequently said with manifest complacency.

You ask "Is it desirable & would it be profitable to have your members at present increased"? Nothing have I desired more than an associate or associates in this mission. It has always appeared to me somewhat mysterious that I have been left alone with my dear partner alone to labour in this new mission; & the burthen of my prayer for many months past has been that God would send forth some one to share with us its cares & responsibilities. Why is it dear brethren, that we are left alone? - Have we acted presumptuously in coming here? Is it a post too dangerous to be occupied? Are Africans not concerned with the atonement of Christ? Is there no hope of success here? Have these people no claims upon your sympathies & compassion? If none of these considerations are the influencing cause, why are these people permitted to remain in their ignorance & misery? I have written to Mr Anderson decidedly, that the mission ought to be increased without delay. Almost any number of teachers & missionaries might be advantageously employed within a few miles of this place.

There are perhaps about 20,000 souls within a circle of twenty miles of this place, all speaking the same language & all accessible to the Missionary. But this population is a mere fraction compared with the many thousands who inhabit Western Africa. From the Senegal on the North to the Congo on the South (several thousand miles) the coast is lined with human habitations - & the interior far & wide is animated with human life. And when it is remembered that the millions who are embraced within these limits are Savages, can it be asked with

with propriety whether are needed missionaries, or not? I have not forgotten, dear brethren, the calamitous results which have crowned all previous efforts to establish missions on this coast; nor am I disregardful of the opinions of those who doubt the expediency of persevering in this cause. But I cannot see that there is sufficient reason to halt or pause. It seems to me a christian duty to exercise the utmost care of human life; & especially that of the christian ministers whose labours the world so much needs. If there was no hope or possibility of surviving the ravages of the fever, it would be needless, yea presumptuous, for any one to come here. But there is I think a reasonable prospect for men of good health to survive. Those however who have made up their minds to come out, should expect to undergo much & severe sickness before they are permitted to commence their labours; at least this has been the case with myself & and whoever is willing to undergo these sufferings will be amply repaid in the privilege of laboring in a most interesting cause. I feel it a great privilege to be permitted in any measure to heal the breaches in the peace & happiness of this people, which has been made by our fathers - Yes it is sweet to pour the oil upon wounded hearts. I love to tell this people that there is a place where there are no tumults, no wars, no treachery, no heartburnings; & when I look upon the flaring vessels (as I often do) hovering along this coast my heart feels for the miseries they are about to inflict & the many tears that will be shed; but at the same time I indulge the cheering reflection that we are laying the foundation stone for a superstructure that will ere long resist all encroachment & turn aside every aggression upon the peace & happiness of Africans. Come

Come then, dear brethren, you who have hearts to feel for Africans, & join us - come in the spirit of Missions - determined by the grace of God, to bear all sorts of trials & live & die in the cause of God. If your zeal is crowned with an early death, will it not be a speedy introduction to your fathers house? - Ought the Christian to be dispirrited at a release from his troubles - should the prisoner dread freedom? No, Brethren, Come to us leaving the result with God & all will be well. With regards to fever above referred to, I ought to say, that although it attacks all, continues long & is often severe, it seldom proves obstinate against medicine it generally yields to medicine. I have now special reference to this section of the Coast. It is now about eighteen months since this settlement was first commenced - during this time there have been about 100 emigrants settled here, & I think I am correct in saying that there has not occured more than one single death among the adults of this community that could be attributed to the fever.

Another inquiry you have made is "What particular studies should a man direct his attention to who expects to labour in Africa". I think in general that there should be no deviation from the course of studies that are ordinarily pursued in the Seminaries. In the interior of the Country there is a large & interesting Community of people called Mandingoes. They are Mahomedans & many of them familiar with the Arabic Language - there are none of them in this section of the Country nor do they ever visit this section part of the Coast. It would be well for those who expect to labour among among this tribe to have some knowledge of the Arabic: some knowledge of medicine the principles of medicine would be valuable. I think it would be well

for those who come here to refresh their minds with some of the naturals sciences. There is an ample field here for botanical & mineralogical pursuits; & also for natural history. These things may often furnish a needful recreation to the mind —

You inquire about the climate of this country. There are two seasons in the year — one called the "dries" & the other "rainy season" The first commences in Nov. or Dec. & continues until May or June — the other from June to Nov. It must not be thought however that there are no rains during the dry season — or that the rains are not interrupted after they set in. During the dry season the heat is generally between 80° & 84° Fah. — & between 76° & 80° during the rains. The climate so far as we have tried it is more uniform & quite as pleasant as that in any part of the U. States & that of the most favourable season.

Although the mercury stands at a high point we are incommoded much less by heat than colds. Hence it would be well for those who come to Africa to be well supplied with flannels & other warm clothes — also a supply of light clothes for the "dries".

"Should all missionaries going to Africa be married"? There are no objections to females coming here that do not lie in the way of going to any other pagan lands. And I know no reason why women of suitable character may not be useful in any pagan country. are not her sex in heathen country universally degraded & ignorant? — & is it not natural that she should seek for them, & proper that she should put forth her hands to raise them up?

Thus, dear brethren, I have replied as far as I am able to your several inquiries. You will remember that I have just commenced my Mipionary ~~labors~~ labours & have not sufficient experience to advise confidently on those subjects in which you feel most interest. The advice & views of older brethren in the Mipionary field will be a much safer guide. I trust that Africa, although few come to her, still has a place in your sympathies & prayers, & that we are not forgotten.

That the blessing of God may rest upon you individually, upon your Society & the ~~effor~~ Seminay, is our earnest prayer

In the bonds of xtian love I am

dear Brethren yours &c Sleighton Wilson

I will endeavour to forward you some curiosities — perhaps not at the same time with this letter.

Rome

Received Dec. 26, 1838.

Answ. Dec. 31, 1838.

Mr. David White

Corresponding Sec. of Board of Superv.

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Two sheets